

Calendar No. 1403

69TH CONGRESS }
2d Session }

SENATE

{ REPORT
No. 1381

PERSONS WHO SERVED IN THE MILITARY TELEGRAPH CORPS DURING THE CIVIL WAR

FEBRUARY 3, 1927.—Ordered to be printed

Mr. DALE, from the Committee on Pensions, submitted the following

REPORT

[To accompany S. 1959]

The Committee on Pensions, to which was referred the bill (S. 1959) granting relief to persons who served in the Military Telegraph Corps of the Army during the Civil War, having considered the same, report thereon favorably with the recommendation that it do pass without amendment.

Similar bills have heretofore been favorably reported, as follows: S. 982, Senate Report 251, Fifty-eighth Congress, second session; H. R. 5815, House Report 824, Sixty-sixth Congress, second session; S. 1343, Senate Report 564, Sixty-seventh Congress, second session; and S. 1535, Senate Report 592, Sixty-eighth Congress, first session.

The merits of this proposed measure are fully set out in the report of the House Committee on Military Affairs, on House bill 5815, Sixty-sixth Congress, and is hereby made a part of this report, as follows:

[House Report No. 824, Sixty-sixth Congress]

The bill as reported is intended to give to the persons indicated a military status and place them on the same footing as other members of the Army of the United States who served in the Civil War, and accord to them at this late date the privileges of pension, etc., to which your committee thinks they are justly entitled.

During the Civil War the Military Telegraph Corps consisted of about 1,500 operators and a sufficient force of linemen. They built and operated 15,389 miles of telegraph lines exclusively devoted to military purposes. In addition to this many lines of commercial companies were taken over and made use of by the Government.

The service was creditably performed, and the reports of the Secretary of War and the commanding generals bear uniform testimony to their efficiency, intelligence, and patriotism. Their duties were purely military and were performed with the same exposure to the dangers of the battle field and disease as fell to the lot of the officers and soldiers of the Army. These men now designated by previous legislation as members of the Military Telegraph Corps constituted an integral and vitally essential part of the Army and brought this new system of

communication in the Army to a state of perfection never before equaled in military science. The duties imposed on these men required the service of persons of peculiar intelligence, and its members were picked from the great number of operators on account of special prominence acquired in what was at this time a mysterious art. These duties were almost continuous, unrelieved by the excitement and relaxations of ordinary camp life. And it is somewhat surprising that these men were not organized at this time as a department of the Army.

The official record of the service of these men is to be found in the pay roll and notices in the general reports. It is known that of the entire number of men employed, 199 were either killed, died of disease, or were captured while in the line of duty. It is estimated that more than 100 others suffered from the casualties of the service.

As early as April 22, 1861, eight days after the fall of Fort Sumter, Andrew Carnegie, who at that time was assistant general manager of military railroads and telegraphs, made requisition on the superintendent of telegraphs, Pennsylvania Railroad Co., Altoona, Pa., for some of his best operators to proceed to Washington at once prepared to enter the Government service for the war. This was practically the beginning of the United States Military Telegraph Corps, which afterwards constituted the very nerves of the Army.

The members of this corps were field couriers with special and arduous duties to perform—duties involving great responsibilities.

General Grant, in his Memoirs, tells us how his own headquarters and those of his Army and division corps commanders were kept in constant touch with each other in camp at the close of each day's march, and he makes the following comment:

"Nothing could be more complete than the organization of this body of brave and intelligent men. In very many instances our offices were worked in the very front lines of battle. No orders ever had to be given to establish the telegraph."

Hardly a day intervened when General Grant did not know the exact state of facts between himself and General Sherman, more than 1,500 miles away, as the wires ran.

The history of this great war is replete with the achievements and work of this body of loyal men who received in pay and compensation no more than the enlisted man in the ranks when you take into consideration the fact that they were compelled to clothe and support themselves.

This report can not well go into details as to the service performed by these men, but a careful reading of the hearings before the subcommittee of the Committee on Military Affairs of the House of Representatives will present many interesting facts concerning the service of these men. At the present time and for years past the service performed by these men is recognized in our Army organization as military service of the highest character, and is a service which calls for highly trained men. The men for whom we are enacting this legislation were the pioneers in this work. They blazed the trail which has been followed by all armies of all civilized nations, and to-day this service is recognized as one of the most essential branches of the Army service.

Referring again to the reason for not making these men at that time a recognized part of the Military Establishment we must recognize that the value of this service was then but little known, and the further fact that the Secretary of War, while appreciating the value of the service, thought that by having these men directly under him, and not subject to the immediate military control of the different commanding officers, he would have a closer touch with them; and as the secrets of the Army as well as of the Nation were to be intrusted to these men it was the opinion of the Secretary of War that he should have these men entirely under his control and not under the command of their superior officers.

By taking this attitude concerning this corps these men have been deprived of the rights and benefits which have been conferred upon other men who so faithfully served their country during this critical period.

The testimony before your committee discloses the fact that the survivors of this corps number at the present time less than 200 men; that, deducting from this number 40 commissioned officers and enlisted men, would leave but 160 men to be benefited by this legislation, and investigation discloses the fact that 43 widows of these men would benefit by the provisions of this act; and the total amount for the first year necessary to comply with the provisions of this act would not exceed a total of \$45,000. This sum would be very rapidly reduced as the years go by.

Under an act of Congress approved January 26, 1897, entitled "An act for the relief of telegraph operators who served in the War of the Rebellion," the services of these men were recognized, and a certificate of honorable service in the Military Telegraph Corps of the Army of the United States was provided for in this act. Under the terms of the present bill only the men who have received such certificates, or are entitled to receive such certificates, or the widow of any such man, would be entitled to any benefits.

In view of the investigation as made, and taking into consideration the degree and value of the service rendered by these men, your committee believes that it is a simple act of justice on the part of the Government to give these men the status to which they are entitled.

Above report is dated April 13, 1920. According to this report, the total number of persons who would have been benefited by this legislation at that time was 203, at a cost of approximately \$45,000 the first year (160 members of said corps and 43 widows).

On January 14, 1927, Mr. Thomas Morrison, 1612 Riggs Place, Washington, D. C., a member of said corps and its assistant secretary, in a letter addressed to the chairman of this committee stated, "Out of 1,500 or more there are only 32 of us left."

It is therefore reasonable to state that in a lapse of seven years the number of beneficiaries under this bill has been considerably reduced below the number given in above quoted report, and that the annual cost of same, notwithstanding general pension increases granted by Congress in 1926 to veterans of the Civil War and the widows of such veterans, would in all probability not exceed \$40,000.



